

The Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center of Greater Waterbury Inc.

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Re: SB-451 – An Act Concerning Government Administration, State Contracting, Regional School Boards and the State Elections Enforcement Commission.

I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity to submit testimony pursuant to SB-451.

My name is Ron Bourque, and I am the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services at the Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center of Greater Waterbury Inc. Our organization provides an array of programs and services to persons with disabilities and to other disadvantaged groups, touching the lives of over five-thousand person each year. Easter Seal's employment program division focuses on promoting community employment ("real work for real pay"), and employment supports, serving approximately four-hundred individuals with disabilities, residing in twenty-six cities and towns within Western Connecticut.

I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 451, An Act Concerning Government Administration, State Contracting, Regional School Boards and the State Elections Enforcement commission.

Within the competitive work environment, persons with disabilities continue to face a challenging uphill struggle in vying for competitive job openings in the workplace. Unemployment numbers for the disabled in Connecticut hover in the 60% range. For several years now, your colleagues in the Connecticut State legislature have continued to be a highly effective and proactive partner with the private provider community, in facilitating full community inclusion and engagement of persons with disabilities through employment. Furthermore, your efforts are enhancing the ability of persons with disabilities to live, work, thrive, participate and benefit from the daily lives they lead within their respective communities. You are truly making a difference in the lives of persons with disabilities, their families and the private provider community by demonstrating your continued commitment to programs that work and that work efficiently.

In 2013, the legislature's endorsement of SB 761, making permanent a program promoting employment for people with disabilities and economic disadvantages was enacted. That legislation made it possible for eighty-three of Easter Seal's workers to continue working within their jobs. And now, as our efforts focus on SB-451, it presents another significant opportunity to expand upon SB-761, and to provide even more employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in our State. There is absolutely no downside to the bill as it again promotes expanded work opportunities for the disabled, who will continue to provide quality work within State contracts..

With the enacting of this legislation (SB-451), we believe that workers with disabilities will have not only expanded opportunities for job growth, but also expanded options and diversity in the type of jobs they can acquire. The cost of services provided through this legislation is provided at fair market value, and it has proven itself to be a cost effective contractual alternative for the State. This legislation will be a win-win for the State of Connecticut, and its citizens with disabilities. By adding jobs/work opportunities, we can continue to decrease a high State of Connecticut unemployment rate for our disabled citizens, as well as increasing our ability at meeting the needs of our underemployed.. As one of several hundred providers in our State, Easter Seals believes that all work opportunities should be available to all citizens. There is little doubt that full inclusion of persons with disabilities contributes immeasurably to the overall enrichment of our communities.

Easter Seals Waterbury is extremely thankful for the depth of discussion and deliberation that your committee is putting into SB-451. You give us all great inspiration and hope as we continue to march forward in our joint efforts to ensure equal opportunity for all citizens in our State. We sincerely thank you for your commitment to this issue.